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## Traditional versus Progressive Practices in Teaching Language Usage

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**E**LEMENTARY school courses for training pupils in language usage are notoriously ineffective. After the teachers of the elementary school have given almost constant training in usage, the pupils enter high school and college habitually using incorrect expressions and lacking ability to express ideas in an organized and precise manner. How can we account for the general failure to get results in teaching correct and fluent language usage, failure to "get language teaching across"? This article is designed to show fallacious or ineffective procedures in the traditional methods of teaching language usage, and to suggest improved practices, some of which have been experimentally determined as superior, others of which are recommended by prominent authorities or are being introduced into progressive schools. The teaching of language usage in the early primary grades will be disregarded in this paper, as instruction there tends to be informal with emphasis upon spontaneity and enrichment of expression rather than upon correct usage, which is generally taught by incidentally correcting the expression of individual pupils.

As defined in this paper, traditional methods of teaching language usage may be characterized as follows: The language

course is based almost entirely on a textbook. The lessons in usage which the textbook contains are taught to all the pupils, usually in the order of appearance. Most textbooks are a miscellany of disconnected and jumbled lessons on poem and picture study, oral and written composition, dramatization, correct usage, and vocabulary study. Language courses, therefore, are disorganized and non-cumulative. Too often topics for the lessons are arbitrarily assigned and no opportunity is given for the pupils to discuss topics of immediate and vital interest. Likewise expressional situations arising when teaching the other subjects are neglected so that excellent chances for applying the principles and facts of language usage are lost.

What then are the wasteful and ineffective practices that are characteristic of traditional methods of teaching? A few of the major types of wasteful practices are discussed in the paragraphs immediately following.

(1) Language is taught as a subject distinct from others. Phases of usage that have been carefully developed and practiced during the language period are disregarded in the other lessons of the day. Inasmuch as children are constantly expressing their ideas throughout the school day, inasmuch as incorrect and faulty practice is as effective in

forming habits as is correct practice, the quality of the children's language usage will largely be determined by the accuracy and fluency of their usage during extra-language-class instruction. This isolated teaching of language—in a separate period, with topics unrelated to lessons in the other subjects, with little attempt to have applied in these subjects the expressional skills with which language instruction has dealt—is in large part responsible for pupils' not assimilating lessons in language usage.

(2) Traditional language instruction neglects the needs and interests of the pupils' daily life. Every day the pupils are set agog with interest by some incident on the playground, by some unusual happening at home or in the community. Yet even if this event is of educational value, the pupils are usually given no opportunity in language class to express their interest and points of view, but have to talk stiffly on some assigned topic such as "My Most Interesting Ride." The pupils are brought one by one before the group to stand in ramrod-like style to give three or four-sentence stories and are denied the opportunity to converse and discuss informally as they would in real life. How can we expect instruction given so artificially to carry over to the situations where they express themselves spontaneously and naturally?

The isolation of language instruction from the teaching of other subjects and from real-life situations is not alone responsible for the ineffectiveness of the instruction. (3) The fault also lies in the procedures incident upon the mass instruction of the American public schools. The same language lesson is taught to the entire group regardless of the fact that a large proportion of the class is already sufficiently proficient in the phase under consideration. On the other hand, these same pupils may never be instructed in other skills and usage in which they are decidedly deficient. Individual needs tend to be disregarded.

A quite different wasteful practice due to pressure of numbers is that of giving written

drill upon skills and elements of usage that are more needed in oral expression. Psychology teaches us that practice should be given in situations as nearly identical as possible with those for which the person is preparing. Written drill will not necessarily help in improving oral usage, yet the teacher finds it hard to provide time for oral practice and gives written drills which are unlikely to affect habits of speech.

(4) It may well be that instruction in language usage from year to year does not provide a representative sampling of the various phases of usage. An analysis would likely show that certain phases receive strong emphasis year after year, while others will be entirely neglected, though certain pupils might greatly need to improve in the omitted phases. Thus instruction in usage is too often not pertinent to the pupils' needs.

(5) The fifth and last wasteful practice to be considered is that the course of study, whether based on a textbook or not, is disorganized. Lessons featuring the various phases of language instruction are arranged in hodge-podge order, so that the rules of habit formation—such as distributed practice—cannot operate. Some element of correct usage is developed in a simple lesson, perhaps thoroughly, then left untouched for a considerable period of time and finally given a small place in some miscellaneous review lesson. Therefore lessons are non-cumulative and isolated. The pupils are made to flit from one phase of language instruction to another and have little opportunity to master any.

Language instruction that is kept in isolation, lessons that are incoherent and non-cumulative, courses that unnecessarily repeat practice on some items of usage and neglect others, practice given to entire groups of pupils regardless of individual abilities, interests and needs—all these wasteful practices are necessarily conducive to non-mastery and lack of interest on the part of pupils. Boys and girls cannot see the value of lessons that do not bear on their consciously realized

needs and interests. They are not interested in improving their language usage and fail to apply in their ordinary intercourse the principles and items of usage that have been developed in language class. The end-result is that pupils continue to use meager, loose, incorrect expression and go on through school and into life handicapped by ignorance and undesirable habits of expression.

Happily more effective and economical practices in teaching language usage are being put into effect. Problems of individual needs and interests, of consistent and continuous practice in likelike situations, of systematic and well-distributed drill, and of a unified course of instruction are being studied and solved through controlled experimentation. A few of the more advisable improved practices in teaching language are discussed in the paragraphs following.

Particularly appropriate to the effective teaching of language usage is the practice of taking a *systematic inventory* or survey of the pupils' needs, abilities, and interests at the beginning and end of a term or semester. The inventory may also come upon the initiation and completion of an integrated unit of work which comprehends specific elements of language usage. The purposes of this inventory are (1) to determine the degree of mastery—by the group and individuals—of the phases that had been included in previous language instruction; (2) to determine which of the elements assigned for training in lessons immediately to follow have already been mastered by some or all of the pupils; (3) to determine pupil-grouping so as to enable instruction on the basis of known needs; (4) to determine emphasis and the order of presentation for the various items to be taught.

The inventory should be guided by a check-list of items and skills that have been stressed in the language teaching of preceding grades, also those that are to be emphasized during the ensuing year. Such a check-list can be based on the local course of study or can be devised by a committee of teachers who decide upon the points of emphasis for each grade.

Thus can concentrated attention be given each year to a restricted list of language items and skills. Such intensive coordinated attention should lead to mastery. Each teacher then may take an inventory on the basis of a check list made up both of review and new items and may record in chart form the items known or unmastered by each pupil, thus revealing both group and individual needs. (Items to be tested may be listed vertically at the left of the chart; the pupils' names may be placed at the head of the columns. Such matters as voice control, elements of sentence sense, mastery of vocabulary, and correct usage may be tested.) The Denver schools are trying out a system whereby the chart records the percentage of group success, per item; e. g., 90 to 100 percent of success might mean individual attention to the few who failed; 60 to 90 percent might mean a brief review for the entire group with supplementary small-group instruction, etc. At any rate, teachers are evolving a method of systematic inventory that reveals the exact needs of pupil-groups and of individuals. Thus may improvement in language usage be motivated through "a felt need" developed by means of acquainting each pupil with the results of a systematic inventory.

Only as the inventory is followed by *appropriately assigned practice*, is it of value. The entire group of pupils should be trained in the phases where practically all are weak, and even here there should often be proper differentiation in difficulty, amount, and type of practice materials. Probably most of the practice will have to be individualized or handled for small pupil-groups having difficulties in common. Oral phases are somewhat hard to handle and yet should undoubtedly receive more emphasis than is usually accorded them. Small groups may be organized and quietly practice together the element to be used—several groups at once if they are ready for independent work; otherwise, one group under the teacher's direction while the remaining pupils do independent seatwork. The entire group may



receive individualized practice through preparing oral exercises and talks according to the assignment given to each pupil on his individual slip of paper. Eventually the teacher should so train the pupils in self-evaluation that they may carry on independently in school and out.

Written exercises are perhaps not so hard to individualize. The local Training School is now trying out a system that promises to be highly successful. A few copies of several kinds of workbooks have been purchased, cut up, and the pages mounted. All exercises giving practice on any single element of language usage are filed together. Each sheet is numbered, the numbers running without break through the entire set of drill materials. The first sheet in the file is an alphabetical index, of which the following is an actual specimen:

A. Abbreviations

- |                                |          |
|--------------------------------|----------|
| 1. Mr., Mrs., Dr., St., months | 97 — 106 |
| 2. Months                      | 112 — 31 |
| 3. Months                      | 160 — 69 |

B. Antonyms

71 — 75

C. Capitalization

- |                     |          |
|---------------------|----------|
| 1. Days             | 112 — 21 |
| 2. Holidays         | 57 — 66  |
| 3. I                | 170      |
| 4. Names of persons | 140 — 49 |
| 5. Sentences        | 150 — 59 |

To economize space, the backs of the mounting sheets are also used, the first series of numbers running straight through from front to back of the file. Then the file is reversed, and the sheets are numbered in the reverse direction, the numbers going on from the place where the first series of numbering stopped.

There is also a second index, this consisting of the pupils' names placed about two inches apart, so that the name and page number of drills that have been assigned may be recorded. For each drill, a grade is entered to indicate the degree of the pupils' success in carrying out the drill.

Typical procedure is as follows. A test

involving the various phases of capitalization to be considered in a certain grade is devised, each type of capitalization being used several times. After the test, the list of individual needs is made. A pertinent drill exercise for each pupil is then taken from the file and arranged according to the seating chart. Each pupil puts on a separate sheet of paper his name and the number of the card and then writes out the practice exercise. The papers are corrected and the results are recorded on the second index card in the file as explained in the preceding paragraph. The drill must be repeated if done poorly. Equivalent forms are given out for several days of concentrated drill; some time elapses, then a review exercise is given.

Thus may individual needs be cared for in a regular language period, but no matter how thorough, practice in language usage restricted to a separate language period cannot be fully effective. The pupils should be encouraged—nay, required—to *carry over into their other lessons* the expressional skills that have been emphasized in language instruction. Thus may more continuous practice be provided, the hope being that the pupils will carry desirable forms of expression on into out-of-school life. Language expression called out by discussion and reports in the content subjects has purpose; it demands effectiveness; the pupils hence see the value of language drills and practice. There is provided the desirable audience situation where each speaker has an audience interested in hearing his message, in lieu of the traditional method of having formal, cut-and-dried talks and stories given as a mere exercise. It may be that no separate daily language period will be required, the content subjects providing ample opportunities for both well motivated oral and written expression, and language drills being given in a separate period on only those days when the necessity for such drills has become obvious to teacher and pupils alike.

Another improved practice has to do with the *better organization* of lessons in language usage. The current tendency is towards the



# Children and Poetry\*

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"Fog" from RING-A-ROUND, by  
M. P. Harrington. Macmillan

INVESTIGATORS of children's reading interests have found that young children nearly always enjoy poetry, but that interest begins to wane as early as nine or ten years. By ten, Terman found, only about ten per cent of the girls and fifteen per cent of the boys read poetry voluntarily. He found that at a later age the girls again liked poetry. This Terman concludes cannot be said to be the result of normal development changes. Children show distinct likes and dislikes for certain poems and whether these poems are by the same author makes no difference.

Liking depends also upon environment. Just as it has been found that country boys and girls sing more than city boys and girls for pleasure, and continue this wholesome form of recreation into a later period of maturity, so I have noted that boys from rural districts, especially where the natural environment was attractive—streams, mountains, waterfalls and woods—love poetry. Big lads, fifteen or sixteen, were not ashamed to ask for a book of poems or as they expressed it, "another story" (and happily they made no distinction between fiction and non-fiction with respect to poetry) like the one about the man who "planted the appleseeds everywhere," or "the fellow who held the bridge."

\*This article was prepared under the direction of the Chairman of the Book Evaluation Committee of the Section for Library Work with Children of the American Library Association, Miss Harriet W. Leaf.



"Check" from RING-A-ROUND, by  
M. P. Harrington. Macmillan

Children are really more likely than grown-ups to like poetry. And this seems natural. Poetry is the most primitive of all literature, and has been found to precede prose literature in every country. It requires a more complete surrender of oneself than any of the other arts, and children are able to make this surrender more readily than adults. In the child the purely intellectual faculty is still unawakened and therefore poetry more than prose is able to move immature minds and to touch child nature. Too, poetry is a thing of the imagination and the senses, and "All the world to me, is a place of wonder," says the child.

Poetry to be loved must be comprehended by the entire being. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" should cast a spell over one in order to feel its beauty. The savage and splendid beauty of the sea in storm in Masefield's "Dauber" must be felt to be appreciated.

What is behind the statement made by so many adults, "But, you know, children do not like poetry." The explanation often lies in the home, because poetry so often ends with Mother Goose, and few parents are well enough acquainted with the world's store of poetry to guide children intelligently in their poetry reading. The home is the ideal place for poetry for there the psychological moment can be taken advantage of. Poetry more than any other type of literature must have its perfect moment to be properly enjoyed.

The child's mood should always be taken into account.

Frequently the explanation lies in the teaching method, especially in an emphasis upon scansion, and subtle interpretation, and analysis, instead of treating poetry as an art which finds its truest expression in beauty of word and sound. Like story telling, only the poems which one is really interested in, and enthusiastic about, should be presented and presented orally, in an informal, simple, sincere manner. There should be much repetition of old favorites, great variety in choice, so that richness and breadth of impression may be gained, as well as variety in verse forms. Recent poetry about subjects interesting to youth of today may win some hesitating child. So much of the subject matter of contemporary verse is concerned with the child's own world, and it speaks in the child's own speech. There are no obscure references or obsolete words. It is in simple English. Carl Sandburg's poetry is an example. Too much poetry should not be read at one time. Both adults and children tire of poetry more quickly than prose, perhaps for the very reason that it plays upon the emotions to a larger extent than prose. It is better to return to a poem frequently than to stay with it too long.

To be most appreciated and enjoyed poetry should be linked with every experience of the child—celebrations of various kinds, journeyings to the zoo, or distant places, or nature ramblings. An ideal time to share "The Water Ousel" would be when this daring little bird is seen darting joyously under the spray of a waterfall. When the ghostly flowers of the Indian Pipe are found under the decayed leaves in the woods, Florence Coates' picture poem "The Indian-Pipe" will be enjoyed and result in closer observation and appreciation of the flower itself. A sight, or even a picture, of ducks dabbling in the water will be the time for Kenneth Grahame's delightful poem "The Duck's Ditty"<sup>1</sup> and will bring chuckles of amusement:

All along the backwater,  
Through the rushes tall,  
Ducks are a-dabbling,  
Up tails all!

It is a mistaken idea that everything in a poem must be understood for perfect enjoyment and appreciation. Children will see or feel enough to get the meaning, and will gradually see more as time passes. Difficult words should not bar a poem that possesses beauty of sound and creates a mood which the child recognizes and enjoys.

A child understands far more than grown-ups give him credit for. Many words are understood by ear that are not recognized by sight. As Andrew Lang said in his fine introduction to *THE BLUE POETRY BOOK*, "A child's imaginative life is spent in unknown future and in romantic past. Never try to tell a child not to read this or that because he cannot understand it. . . The half-understanding of it, too, the sense of a margin beyond, as in a wood full of unknown glades and birds and flowers unfamiliar, is a great part of a child's pleasure in reading. . . The child does not want everything to be explained. In the unexplained is great pleasure." In this connection one should not be afraid of searching in purely adult collections for poems for children. The criteria are briefly, simplicity of thought and form. The Greek, Chinese, and Egyptian literatures all hold treasures in poetry for children and even for very little children. As an example, there is "Pan" from the Greek Anthology, titled, *AMARANTH AND ASPHODEL*:<sup>2</sup>

Be still, ye wooded cliffs and waterfalls  
And mingled bleatings from the murmuring meads:  
For Pan with sweetly ringing music calls,  
Laying his lip on pipe of bounden reeds:  
And round him, dancing swift with glimmering feet,  
Nymphs of the forest and the fountain meet.

Explanations of poems, even oral, are very boring to a child, unless very artistically rendered. Poetry should speak for itself. Ex-

<sup>1</sup> FROM *THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS*. Published by Charles Scribner's Sons.

<sup>2</sup> Published by Houghton Mifflin.

planations are in most cases out of place. Poetry is too personal a thing to be explained. The father of a great Irish poet once remarked, "What can be explained is not poetry." "The poems that are obvious are like the puzzles that are already solved. They deny us the joy of seeking and creating." And too, what is poetry for one person is doggerel for another. It all depends upon the individual. How much better the collection *SILVER PENNIES*, so worth while in its selection, would be without the prefacing interpretations to each poem. Some would not recognize their picture of "The Lone Dog," for instance, from the descriptive paragraph introducing this poem. That delightful anthology, De la Mare's *COME HITHER*, places at the end of the book "passages written about and roundabout the poems" where they will trouble no reader who "prefers poems and poems only." Of course we are talking about poetry to be read for pleasure.

Now what shall be read first? It is difficult to say. We can only generalize, yet always bearing in mind that there is no average child, that age groupings must always show considerable overlappings, and should never be strictly adhered to. We can only feel our way about, and by remembering our own childhood likings, by observing children of today, and by studying their differing interests we may hope to blaze a trail that will entice the child to explore ever further and ever more independently.

We would probably all agree that one could not begin too early to read poetry to the child. One librarian has said that a month old baby is not too young for his first taste of poetry. Psychologists tell us that primacy is the strongest factor in establishing habits. The nursery school owes its

origin in part to this theory. So why not the poetry habit! Lullabies, simple lyrical hymns, such as Martin Luther's "Cradle Hymn," and old story songs suggest themselves for this early stage, to be followed by action rhymes. Such selections are characterized by rhythmic motion both of body and voice. Poetry makes its first appeal to the small child through rhythm. There follows the catching rhyme and rhythms and delightful nonsense of Mother Goose for two years and about. There is a wealth of lovely editions of Mother Goose, both complete and abridged, to choose from. Of the latter, Jessie W. Smith's *LITTLE MOTHER GOOSE* is a great favorite, as is also Kate Greenaway's quaint little *MOTHER GOOSE*. The latter is just the right size for a little child. A little boy around three carried this small green volume to bed with him every night for over a year in company with his Teddy Bear. There are also the charming editions of Mother Goose rhymes set to music by Willebeck Le Mair: *OUR OLD NURSERY RHYMES* and *LITTLE SONGS OF LONG AGO*. Around three the field widens to include the beloved *WHEN WE WERE VERY YOUNG*. This perfect book for the little child belongs to every nursery, together with Stevenson's *CHILD'S GARDEN OF VERSES*. Rossetti's *SING-SONG* and the new edition of twenty of Blake's poems, *THE LAND OF DREAMS*, selected and illustrated by Pamela Bianco, are also suitable. In the latter book all poems would not be enjoyed by the very little child. Those most adapted to early years have been collected in such anthologies as Edgar's *A TREASURY OF VERSE FOR LITTLE CHILDREN* and Harrington's *RING-A-ROUND*.

From three to six or seven, there is an abundance of good things. Perhaps first, *PEACOCK PIE*, that facinat-



"The General Store" from *TAXIS AND TOADSTOOLS* by Rachel Field. Doubleday, Doran



ing volume which contains such child treasures as, "Some One," "The Cupboard," "The Barber's," "Long-Legs," "Miss T," "The Bee's Song," to mention but a few. This collection contains the greater part of De la Mare's verse for children. His verse has a childlike quality but is never childish, and is marked by strong rhythms and dramatic feeling. The volume begins with very simple verse. De la Mare's *A CHILD'S DAY* would delight any little child. It brings to mind the picture book of *PEGGY AND PETER*, but Elizabeth Ann from her waking to her slumbers has stranger and more wonderful adventures than ever befell Peggy and Peter. *SKIPPING ALONG ALONE* is a new and delightful collection for a child. Hilda Conkling's *POEMS BY A LITTLE GIRL* contain some simple, natural poems about the child's world which little children will enjoy, such as "The Snail," "Chickadee," and "Dandelion," among others. Farjeon's *JOAN'S DOOR* has some delightfully childlike poems. "The Old Man's Toes" is reminiscent of Milne's "Lines and Squares." What child's imagination has not played over the fascinating field of adventure afforded by a walk on a street pavement. Rose Fyleman's *FAIRIES AND CHIMNEYS* is a favorite with most children. The poems in Rachel Field's *TAXIS AND TOADSTOOLS* have a childlike quality and charm and will suggest to children new ways of see-

ing city and country and delight them in its expression of their own moods and play. "The General Store" is particularly childlike: "It will be my store and I will say, What can I do for you to-day." *POINTED PEOPLE*, by the same author, will also be enjoyed by little folks. *POSY RING* is still a favorite volume and a new collection of Eugene Field's poems, selected by Bertha E. Mahoney, will be liked.

After this period of story telling poems, lyrics and verses, epics and ballads will be enjoyed in the middle years before adolescence. But lyrics should always be retained. Poetry for this period should still have strongly accented rhythms. Sad as well as merry poems are liked. Teasdale's *RAINBOW GOLD*, chiefly lyrics, and selected for the child the poet compiler used to be, and the boy who was her playmate, is a very satisfactory anthology. Many of De la Mare's poems in *PEACOCK PIE* are for this period: "Berried," "Tartary," "Silver," "The Ride-By-Nights," "When Lucy Went A-Walking" and others, and the more mature of Hilda Conkling's. The fine ballad tales of Longfellow — the "Skeleton in Armor," and the "Saga of King Olaf" will be enjoyed by the children who are reading the old hero tales and myths, so popular at this age. An ideal anthology for this period is Untermeyer's *THIS SINGING WORLD* and the complete volume is preferable

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"Buffalo Dusk" from *EARLY MOON* by Carl Sandburg. Harcourt, Brace

# Opportunities in Word Study

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IN the handling of language problems teachers have today a particularly hard road to travel. In the past and to some extent even in the present, many teachers of English have been far too dogmatic. But nowadays an influential minority seems to be approaching a dangerous or at least confusing liberality.

The time is almost past when, with cheery confidence, a teacher will assure a class that a preposition is the wrong word to end a sentence with. I do remember, indeed, meeting a principal only within the last year or two who boasted that she had at last attained one goal in her school in that her teachers, at least, no longer committed what seemed to her this heinous offense. Teachers have, however, in general become much more scientific in their attitude, and gradually it is becoming clear that a good English teacher ought to have had some instruction in linguistics.

The hazard lies in that the pendulum appears to be swinging too far in the other direction. Certain of the college instructors especially have swallowed democracy entire in their linguistic doctrines. All that is needed to give a word or an expression validity, in their judgment, is the fact that a majority of persons employs it. If an error is made often enough, in other words, it becomes good English; and one of them went so far, in a certain controversy recently, as to state that in such cases those who preferred the form that for centuries had been considered correct were affected if they used it today, when the error had become common. I confidently expect to learn that this instructor begins his lectures something like this: "I want to tell youse that them old English words ain't so difficult to understand after

all," inasmuch as the supposed solecisms in this sentence are pretty widely diffused in the United States at this time.

Teachers of English must steer a middle course, naturally. Their best procedure is to cultivate open-mindedness and to train judgment in their pupils. The open-mindedness and the training of judgment arise most effectively out of the question-and-answer method. Our Americans today love to ask questions and to know the answers. Few departments in a newspaper are so popular as the question-and-answer box. Teachers ought to be able to arouse linguistic inquisitiveness. Encourage pupils to ask you questions about their language troubles and try to answer them honestly. Honesty will mean that, in a few cases, you will give a definite, positive answer. In quite a number of other cases you will, in the sight of the pupils, resort to your dictionary and find out what that authority says. It may very well happen that the dictionary will give a choice—and you will then make it quite clear that either of two ways of pronouncing or using or spelling a word is correct. In some cases you may want to go further and gather a symposium of authorities.

The following of this method will build up in the minds of pupils the idea that language is a matter of usage, that usage varies in different English-speaking countries and often in different sections of our own country, that sometimes two or three different ways are all right, and that it is possible to consult authorities on matters of language.

If properly handled, it ought not, however, to result in a state of mental anarchy or indifferentism. Certain ways are, after all, right; others are wrong. Good usage in lan-

guage is not determined by gangsters or even college professors: it depends on the past of the language as well as the exact moment that we happen to be living in, and people of intelligence ought, presumably, not to be excluded entirely from the vote on usage that is constantly going on through actual speech-function.

At all stages of the school course, from the pre-kindergarten class to the seminar, similar questions arise, and they can be properly discussed in accordance with the mental age of the class. The nature of slang, of idioms, of colloquialisms; the definition of words newly added because of changes in our civilization; the examination of expression in general as it is effected through words, all are problems susceptible of grading. There can be no doubt that the discussion of such problems is both far more interesting and far more valuable than the diagramming of sentences for a period a day every day of the week during the alleged language period.

Words are so entertaining in themselves and the possible exercises one can employ are so numerous that no teacher ought to be at a loss for class-room material. Take for example the matter of etymology. The strange connection in derivation of three such dissimilar words as *dentist*, *indent*, and *dandelion* ought to prove suggestive. There ought to be interest, too, in tracing the roots of words like *lucid*, *aviation*, *oral*, *tact*, *pedestal*,

*manual*, *aquatic*, *villain*.

Word formation ought to be an important section of word study. Here would be considered roots as well as prefixes and suffixes; and the result ought to be a definite gain in the pupil's vocabulary. Teaching pupils to avoid periphrases is sometimes useful. Substitute "Washington" for "the capital of the United States," and then get them to do the same with "a father of his country," "the inventor of the telegraph," "the goddess of hunting," "the Iberian peninsula," "an account of one's own life," "the seat of the intellect," "the Little Corporal," etc. Then the opposite process may be practised with such words or phrases as Joan of Arc, the moon, Benjamin Franklin, youth, old age, to die, etc. At an early stage pupils should learn (not necessarily with the use of the technical terms) the distinction between the denotation and the connotation of words; and little games of association may be played. They may be told that just as *soldier* calls up images of battle, guns, camps, and the like, so other words evoke definite images, and they may be asked to tell what ideas they associate with *water*, *book*, *farm*, *museum*, *automobile*, *wireless*, *history*, *desert*, etc. Finally, the use of such language tools as the dictionary, Roget, books on usage, and the like should be taught from the beginning. Certainly copies of them should be prominent in the class-room.



# A Basic Lesson on the Sentence\*

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ABOUT twenty eighth-grade boys and girls were being used for demonstration work before a teachers' institute. The instructor, to put the pupils at ease, began by chatting briefly with them about the various kinds of fun they had at school. Finally he asked the lively youngsters, "How many of you have ever had a good time with the fine old subject called grammar?"

An audible sigh, verging on a groan in some spots, arose from the class,

"Why, what does this mean? Doesn't grammar suggest good fun to you?"

"No; it means hard work," spoke up one boy.

"Now tell me," persisted the instructor, "what it is that comes to your mind when you hear the word *grammar*?"

"I think of English lessons," replied a girl.

"What particular lesson have you had recently?"

"We've been studying about sentences."

"That's a good place to begin. What is a sentence?"

"*A sentence is a group of words expressing a complete thought*," chorused several pupils.

"Whose thought is expressed by a sentence?"

The pupils hesitated a moment, then one suggested, "The thought of the one who is speaking."

"Very good. Now look about the room or out of the window, and be ready to express some thought that comes to you."

"*The flag is flying*," said one pupil.

"*The leaves are beginning to fall*," said another.

"*There are many teachers in this room*," said a third.

\* All rights reserved.

"What did each of those who spoke use to express his or her thought?"

"Each one used a sentence."

"How was each thought expressed?"

"It was expressed completely."

"Give in a sentence a definition of the term *sentence*."

"*A sentence is a group of words expressing a complete thought*."

"Now tell me how many complete thoughts a sentence can express."

"One," promptly responded a pupil.

"I think a compound sentence expresses more than one thought," objected another.

"Oh, there are different kinds of sentences, are there?"

"Yes; there are simple and compound and complex," replied the pupil.

"What is a simple sentence?"

"It is a sentence that expresses only one thought."

"Give an example of it."

"*The sun is shining brightly*."

"Why is that a simple sentence?"

"It expresses just one complete thought," was the response.

"Give an example of the compound sentence," directed the instructor.

"*Mary went to the seashore and John went to the woods*."

"Why is that a compound sentence?"

"It expresses two complete thoughts," came the reply.

"How many agree?" asked the instructor. Every hand was raised.

"What is the first complete thought in the compound sentence just given?" he questioned.

"*Mary went to the seashore*."

"What second complete thought is expressed?"

"*John went to the woods.*"

"How would you define a compound sentence?"

"It is a sentence that expresses two complete thoughts," ventured a pupil.

"A compound sentence can have more than two complete thoughts in it," spoke up another.

"Illustrate what you mean," said the instructor.

"*Tony ate candy, Polly ate cake, and I ate ice cream.*"

"Yes," agreed another pupil, "we can put as many thoughts as we want to into a sentence."

"Do you mean that it might be like Tennyson's brook, 'run on forever'?"

"No, not exactly that; but—" returned the pupil as the class laughed.

"Well, I confess that I too am getting a bit puzzled over these definitions you are giving," continued the instructor. "Tell me again what you said a sentence is."

"*A sentence is a group of words expressing a complete thought,*" came the chorus.

"How many thoughts are meant by a complete thought?"

"One," was the prompt response.

"Where did you get that definition?"

"Out of our grammar textbook."

"Who taught it to you?"

There was a little hesitancy, some exchanging of glances about the class and the room before a pupil said, "Our teacher."

"Is the definition you gave of the sentence correct?"

"It is for the simple sentence," replied one of the class, "but not for compound sentences."

"You think, then, that we may put more than one complete thought into the compound sentence. How many of the rest of you agree?"

Again there was unanimous approval.

"You boys and girls seem to be in exactly

the same condition as those of another class I taught not long ago," remarked the instructor. "When I asked the other class for a definition of a sentence, those pupils also said: '*A sentence is a group of word expressing a complete thought.*' Then like you, they said that this definition is correct only for the simple sentence; that a compound sentence might express as many complete thoughts as one cares to put into it. Finally, to study the problem a little further with them, I asked the question: '*What kind of day is it today?*'"

"*It is a changeful day,*" replied a pupil."

"What kind of sentence did the pupil use in his answer?"

"A simple sentence," came the prompt reply.

"Why a simple sentence?"

"It expresses one complete thought," was the response, and all the class agreed.

"Then" continued the instructor, "I asked of these other pupils, '*Why is it a changeful day?*'"

"*'This morning the sun was shining,'* said one."

"What did this pupil use in answer to my question?"

"Another sentence," was the ready reply.

"How many complete thoughts did the pupil express?"

"One," chorused the class.

"Whose thought was expressed?"

"The thought of the pupil that made the sentence," was the response.

"You are all agreed that the pupil did make a sentence," persisted the instructor, "and that he expressed completely the thought he had in mind?"

There was a pause. Finally the evidence of a little new light on an old subject began to come with the raising of two or three hands. The instructor held the leaders a little longer to let the others think further on the problem.

"What was the first question I asked about the day?" he continued.

"*'What kind of day is it?'*"

"How was the question answered?"

By this time half the class were trying to get recognition. One was finally given an opportunity.

"The first question was answered all right," he began, "but the second answer wasn't finished."

"Explain what you mean by that," the instructor directed.

"Well, the second question you asked was, 'Why is it a changeful day?' and the pupil told about what had happened in the morning, not about the rest of the day."

"Suggest how the question might have been completely answered."

*"This morning the sun was shining; now it is raining."*

"What kind of sentence is used in this answer?"

"A compound sentence," came the response.

"How many complete thoughts does this compound sentence express?"

"Two," was the quick reply of two or three of the shallow ones; but others began to protest. They were given opportunity to work out the problem further.

"How much of his thought did the pupil express when he said, '*This morning the sun was shining*'?"

"Only half of it," was the answer.

"When did he express all of the thought he had in mind?"

"He expressed it when he made the compound sentence."

"Then how many complete thoughts did his sentence express?"

"It expressed only one complete thought," all of the class agreed.

"How many questions were completely answered by the compound sentence?"

"Just one question."

"You are right. That is what each well-constructed sentence that tells something does. It answers completely a question in the hearer's or reader's mind. Sometimes to answer the question we use a simple sentence; sometimes we must use a compound sentence. Observe, for example, the following questions and answers:

*What is Henry doing? Henry is picking apples.*

*What is Robert doing? Robert is husking corn.*

*What are the two boys doing? Henry is picking apples and Robert is husking corn.*

"We may also use a complex sentence to answer the question, as, *When is John going to town? He is going to town when the automobile is repaired.*

"The essential thing to remember is that each sentence, whether simple, compound, or complex, expresses one complete thought, and only one. If we try to crowd into a sentence more than one complete thought we may make such jumbled word groups as these: *It is a fine day and calico is worth fifteen cents a yard. I went across the street and say, where is my pencil?*

"A good rule to keep in mind to guide us in expressing our thoughts is this: Say one thing at a time and say it well.

"What do you think now about the definition: *A sentence is a group of words expressing a complete thought?*"

"I think it is right," responded a pupil.

"For what kind of sentence is it right?"

"It is right for every kind of sentence," was the reply.

"What one thing have you learned from this lesson?" came another question.

"I've learned that a well-built sentence expresses one complete thought, and only one," said one pupil.

"I've learned that we should say one thing at a time to say it well," spoke up another.

"I've found out that we can have some good fun with grammar," added a third. "It isn't such a dry old subject after all."

"How many agree with this lad?" came the final question.

All hands were raised. The class was dismissed.

This sketch of a demonstration lesson serves to give concreteness to one vital point: *It is not less, but better grammar that is needed in our schools.*



# Applied Grammar and "Editing"

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MANY upper grade teachers revise children's compositions as a class exercise. These teachers tend to take one of three attitudes concerning the relationship of grammar to such work. One group sees the activity as an opportunity to teach formal grammar; they ask *why* until the bewildered class loses all sight of the ostensible purpose, the improvement of written discourse. Another group either sees no direct relation between grammar and written discourse or lacks the technique to make grammar function. They train children to "listen" for commas and periods, to make the sentence "sound better" when read aloud. The third group of teachers uses the listening technique but supplements it with a reference to pertinent grammatical principles.

This paper offers excerpts from diary records of editing lessons to illustrate the first two types of procedure outlined above. The first excerpt is from a diary of an eighth and ninth grade lesson in a rural school. The sentences were taken from newspaper articles the class had written. The lesson was planned partly in response to a statement from some of the class that they were "all mixed up about capitalization." They had had some experience in editing. The student teacher was a college senior.

The teacher used ten sentences. The three selected illustrate the errors made as well as the teacher's handling of the problem.

Sentence No. 1: a boy guide crept out through the small opening and He called for Help.

- T. What is wrong in this sentence?  
P. It should begin with a capital.  
T. What else?

P. The *He* doesn't belong there at all.

T. Then what would be the subject of the verb *called*?

P. *Boy guide* could be the subject for both verbs.

T. Is anything else wrong?

P. *Help* should not begin with a capital.

T. What part of speech is it?

P. A noun.

T. What kind?

P. A common noun.

Sentence No. 2: the Cause of the Fire was an overheated stove the Students put out the Fire before it did much damage.

T. What corrections should be made in this sentence?

P. It should begin with a capital letter.

T. Should *Cause* begin with a capital?

P. No.

T. Why?

P. It isn't at the beginning of a sentence.

T. What part of speech is it?

P. A verb.

T. Does it tell what anything is or does?

P. No.

T. Read the sentence aloud. That will help you find what the verb is.

P. (After reading aloud) *Was* is the verb.

T. Then what is its subject?

P. *Fire*.

T. Read the sentence without the phrase *of the Fire*. That will help you to see what the subject of the verb is.

P. *Cause* is the subject.

T. Then what part of speech is it?

P. A noun.

T. Proper or common?

P. Common. And it should not be capitalized. Neither should *Fire*.

T. Which *Fire*?

P. Both.

T. Where should the first sentence end?

P. With *stove*. Put a period there, and capitalize the *t*.

T. Anything else?

P. *Students* is a common noun and should not begin with a capital letter.

Sentence No. 3: Miss Ward, a teacher of Sugar Grove School has been absent for the last few weeks because She is ill.

T. What is wrong in this sentence?

P. There should be a comma after *School*.

T. Why?

P. I don't know.

T. What does this part of the sentence do?

P. It tells who Miss Ward is.

T. What do we call that construction?

P. An appositive.

T. Is anything else wrong?

P. If you're going to leave the last part of the sentence like it is, *She* shouldn't have a capital.

(T. changed capital. No use was made of child's suggestion about the last clause in the sentence.)

The suggestions to this student teacher included the following: \*

1. Each pupil might have written his own sentence on the blackboard and then edited it in class before the discussion began. Some of the errors were careless ones, particularly in capitalization. Editing one's own work in public tends to break up careless habits.

2. Grammatical reasons need to be stated only when children do not find an error quickly. Stopping to ask such detailed questions takes attention from the main purpose in editing which is the improvement of written expression.

3. Stress style instead of mechanics. Sentence No. 1 was condensed, but No. 2 needed to be recast into a single sentence. The pupil who commented on No. 3 evidently wanted the last clause in that sentence condensed.

4. If the class really needed help in capitalization, the teaching should have focused

on that during one part of the period. As soon as a rule in capitalization had been stated and used to correct an error, all similar cases could have been located and corrected.

The second excerpt is from an eighth grade class in an urban school. This class had a good background in grammar and considerable experience in editing. A set of short stories revealed a tendency toward involved sentence structure among a number of the group; a lesson in editing was in order. The student teacher was a college senior.

The teacher selected the sentences and wrote them on the blackboard. One sentence will suffice to illustrate the main type of error as well as the teacher's attack:

In a few weeks found Jane's father a rich man and living in a Park ave. apartment also her father still held his night-watchman's job.

The teacher asked the class first to rewrite the sentence on paper. One pupil then wrote his revision on the blackboard:

Jane's father in a few weeks was a rich man living in a Park Avenue apartment still holding his nightwatchman's job.

The discussion which followed got nowhere. Some still thought that beginning the sentence with the phrase gave variety. Others preferred the original participial construction to the revised one. No one pointed out that the adversative nature of the ideas in the two clauses had been lessened in the revision. The result was a sort of vagueness on the children's part.

The suggestions made to this student teacher included the following:

1. Your children know grammatical principles well enough to handle a sentence such as the one about Jane's father from that standpoint. What would have happened in response to a set of questions such as this:

What is the first clause? the second?

Are the ideas offered by the two clauses supporting or contrasting ones? Then what conjunction is needed? What punctuation mark?

# Formal Grammar—Why? What? Where?

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**D**OES an understanding of the laws of our language help the thought-getting and thought-giving processes of individuals in life events?

Does a mastery of grammatical laws forward one's progress and chances for success in all other lines of endeavor both in school and out of school?

Factual grammar can be justified only as it obtains in service. Man is generally known by the language he uses, and the best opportunity in the business and social world come oftenest to those who can use correct language readily, forcibly, and persuasively.

A thorough knowledge of the basal parts of a sentence and the relation of these parts to each other is the foundation of good English. Any attempt to teach correct expression by inventions that ignore knowledge of language laws will always prove a failure.

There has been a tendency to swing too far away from the teaching of formal grammar but, fortunately, the conviction is growing that the systematic study of grammar is necessary for the intelligent use of English. Vocabulary, sentence sense, and thinking ability are gained to a high degree from the study of grammar.

Certain basic grammatical knowledge will always apply to any English teaching process. The pupil must know definite reasons governing word relations and sentence structure. He will then be able to correct his own speech and writing errors and to interpret sentence thought in all school and life materials. Day by day and grade by grade he should be establishing a rational basis for the elimination of his own language difficulties.

According to Franklin Bobbitt, "It is evident that the mother tongue performs a large

function in the community life. The curriculum maker must note, however, the particular ways in which it functions, or should function. Otherwise it is easy for him to miss the road by aiming at a large body of technical information, at literary production on the part of amateurs, or even at nothing more than teaching textbooks without thought or purpose."<sup>1</sup>

The remedy for unsatisfactory results in grammar is not banishment of grammar from the curriculum, but a thorough and articulated teaching of its laws in use by a skilled teacher of English.

In a recent investigation, by the writer,<sup>2</sup> of the grade placement of the elements of formal grammar in twenty-five representative public school systems in the United States, it was found that 113 different items of formal grammar are listed for study in the seventh grade alone—twenty-three under sentence structure and ninety under parts of speech. The number of different items per course of study investigated ranged from none to seventy-four.

This investigation shows further that the eighth and ninth grades are likewise overcrowded with formal grammar material poorly placed by grades as regards related subject matter. Only nine of the twenty-five courses of study showed consistency in the grade placement of the complex sentence and the relative pronoun. Similar inconsistent grade placement tendencies occurred in regard to infinitives, participles, and gerunds. The subjunctive complement is listed as "attribute,"

<sup>1</sup> Franklin Bobbitt, *How to Make a Curriculum*, 238-39. Houghton Mifflin Co., 1924.

<sup>2</sup> Katie Lansdowne, "Grade Placement of the Elements of Formal Grammar in Twenty-five Public School Systems in the United States," Unpublished Master's thesis, Department of Education, University of Wichita, Wichita, Kansas, 1930.



“predicate nominative,” “attribute complement,” and “predicate noun, pronoun, or adjective.”

This overwhelming “bigness” of the subject of formal grammar as thus revealed is, to say the least, confusing to the child mind. From it he gets only a conglomerated mass of fragmentary ideas *about* the whole subject.

The practical question from the standpoint of the teacher is “What to do?”

This confusing “bigness” should be so limited and correlated that the child may know *why* and *where* he is going. He should realize that the work of the year has a practical value, and that it constitutes but a part of the foundation of the whole unit of the subject. Thus he could see a more definite goal toward which to strive—the understanding, step by step, of correct sentence structure and the correct choice and form of the parts of speech with the habit of applying this understanding in his daily thought-getting and thought-giving processes.

Mastery demands more than an exposure to subject matter. A few real experiences which lead to something really learned is far better than many things merely verbalized. We must recognize the desirability of simplicity and reduce the principles of thought analysis to the smallest number, and at the same time we must give the individual in a systematic and coordinated manner the necessary explanation of every lawful construction.

The simple sentence with its simple modifiers thoroughly understood affords a basis of a satisfactory comprehension of compound and complex forms. The pupil may see in phrase and clause modifiers but the expanded equivalents of word modifiers.

The sentence is the logical setting for be-

ginning—instruction in formal grammar, and the verb the pivotal point of attack. When the individual really knows a transitive verb with an object—The boy *raised* the window, a transitive verb without an object—The window *was raised* by the boy, an intransitive complete verb—Boys *swim*, and an intransitive copulative verb—The bird *is* an oriole, may he not also know in a meaningful way all other needed facts of formal grammar?

Beginning sentences should be very, very simple, increasing in reasonable difficulty from grade to grade. The diagram should be used only as a means to picture the above constructions, thus helping the pupil to visualize the result of his decision as to the use of words and word groups. Nothing is to be gained by analyzing or diagramming idiomatic constructions.

The same symbols and nomenclature should be used consistently throughout the grades in order to avoid wasteful readjustments on the part of the child.

What is needed in the field of English today is an organizer at the head of the system with a vision of the integrated unity of the subject material of grammar who can build intelligently upon the social English background of the early grades and parcel out, semester by semester throughout the intermediate grades, certain definite language laws for cumulative mastery. Every English teacher should have both a backward and a forward knowledge of each unit of the whole integrated course.

Surely with fewer items of related formal grammar for study and with progressive emphasis upon basal parts of a sentence gradually including phrase and clause relationships, the student should finally “arrive” and *know* he *knows* grammar.

# An Individualized Group Method of Teaching Language Skills

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EDUCATORS generally agree that the emphasis being given to individualizing instruction is an educational procedure sound in principle, but the method whereby the principle may successfully be applied is not so well determined nor agreed upon. The Winnetka plan, the Dalton plan, and various modifications of the so-called contract plan are illustrations of many attempts to individualize instruction. Since there is so much of value in the group recitation as well as in the individualized recitation, it seems unfortunate that some one has not set about in earnest to work out a practical combination of the two methods that will attract more general consideration.

The plan described in this article is the result of considerable experimentation over a period of years. Since spelling is a vital part of elementary language and composition work, and since it is so definitely an individual matter, the authors began their experiments by an attempt to individualize the teaching of spelling with the hope that if the plan proved successful they could apply whatever was suitable to individualizing the teaching of language skills. Furthermore, since the plan applied to method rather than to determining content, the authors accepted the adopted list of spelling words and worked out what is known as the Allen spelling plan for individualizing the teaching of spelling.

Standard tests showed that the schools co-operating in the experiment were slightly below the standard when the experiment began; but, although the time devoted to teaching spelling was decreased from seventy-five minutes weekly to forty minutes weekly, nevertheless a year later the standard test given showed that the schools had improved

to such an extent they were then above standard. Twenty-six such standard tests have been given semi-annually since then under the direction of four successive supervisors, and the results have shown the schools have consistently ranked above standard in spelling achievement.

The results of the spelling experiment were, indeed, encouraging; and they stimulated the authors in their further study of the possibilities of applying to the teaching of language skills the plan found so effective in individualizing the teaching of spelling.

## *Determining the Language Skills*

Before the spelling plan could be applied to the teaching of language, however, it was necessary to determine which language skills should be taught and the grade placements of the skills. This was no small task. A tabulation by columns for skills and by columns for grades was prepared. Eight of the most modern courses of study of such systems as those of Denver, St. Louis, Oakland, Detroit, and others were studied. Their grade placements of the skills were indicated on the chart form and a grade placement for each language skill was determined accordingly as a majority of grade placements indicated. Results of this study were checked by a comparison with several leading and recent textbooks in the language field. These skills and their grade placements were then compared with the results of such studies as those made by Symonds and Lee, Willing, Foster, Leonard, the Los Angeles Committee, and others. Where there was considerable variance in skills and in grade placements, the authors were compelled to rely upon their own judgments; but in most cases there was de-

cided agreement. The results of the authors' conclusions were then mimeographed for further study and for the experimentations that were to follow.

#### *Determining a Plan*

The authors had the results of their spelling plan as a guide in working out a plan for individualizing the instruction dealing with language and composition skills. Like the findings in spelling that showed that "few pupils miss many words, but many pupils miss a few words," the findings in the language study showed that a few pupils knew many of the skills they were being taught in language work. In fact, a test covering the first half year's work in the local junior high school was given, which showed that pupils knew seventy per cent of the skills that, according to the course of study, were being taught in that half grade. This discovery naturally resulted in a revision of the first semester's requirements in the seventh grade and helped sell the experimental plan to those teaching the language work. The teachers were already familiar with the spelling plan, and the authors merely modified it to make it applicable to the teaching of language skills.

#### *Preliminary Procedure*

The skills and their grade placements had been determined; but before the work could be individualized or prepared for group instruction, individual and group weaknesses had to be determined. To do this the class had to be tested. Standard tests could be used for determining class or group weaknesses, but they were not satisfactory for determining individual weaknesses. New tests had to be constructed that would determine both class and individual weakness on each skill to be taught. Space does not permit explaining in detail how the tests were constructed; suffice it to say that each test was so constructed as to include two or more skills, and that each skill was tested two or more times with sufficient interference items

included to make the test reasonably reliable and valid.

These tests were first mimeographed and tried out in order to make sure that the wording was within the vocabularies of the pupils and reasonably free from ambiguity and other defects. The plan worked so well that within a year the schools where the experiment was tried had come from below standard to above standard according to results of standard tests given. The detailed work of keeping so many sets of mimeographed tests was burdensome, however, and the tests were therefore published in booklet form.

The reader must not conclude that the group or class method of instruction has been discarded. When the tests are given, the results show whether there are class (group) weaknesses requiring class instruction, whether the assignment is one requiring part class and part group instruction, and whether the weaknesses are largely individual problems best solved through individualized instruction.

#### *Classroom Procedure*

The procedure followed in the plan worked out by the authors and now used in many schools may be briefly explained as follows:

Step one. To avoid loss, the booklets (tests) are kept by the teacher. Monitors pass them to pupils according to a prearranged plan, and each pupil without previous preparation attempts the test assigned.

Step two. Booklets are exchanged according to a prearranged plan, and pupils score the tests according to the Teacher's Key, which is available in printed form. The booklets are then returned for the owner to check his own work as marked. The teacher, or a trusted monitor, is the referee. Selected monitors help the teacher to check constantly on errors made in markings by careless pupils.

Step three. Group errors are rapidly determined by show of hands. These group errors become the work for the class as a group. Each pupil is referred to his text to



determine the rule governing the skill at issue, and this procedure becomes a supervised study period.

Step four. When pupils have studied for a given time, which the teacher determines according to difficulty of the skill or skills tested, the teacher proceeds with a drill recitation. Pupils are called upon promiscuously. The one called upon rises, reads the sentence containing the error made, corrects the error, and, in his own words but as nearly like the book wording as possible, quotes the rule governing the correction. For example, suppose that the error to be corrected is the misuse or omission of a comma in a series in this sentence: "John has lived in St. Louis, Chicago, and Denver;" but that the pupil has failed to insert a comma after "St. Louis." He rises, reads the sentence, and says, "There should be a comma after *St. Louis* because a comma is used to separate words in a series." This procedure continues, with the skills at issue, in a rapid intensive manner of drilling for a few minutes, after which time the pupils proceed with their individual difficulties, or another assignment. The teacher should always have a supplementary assignment ready for those pupils who do not need individual work.

Step five. Each pupil records his score on the Score Sheet conveniently provided on the first page of the test booklet. Space is there provided also for a record of each succeeding test. These records indicate both to teacher and to pupil the progress being made by the pupil. The better pupils may be assigned to assist the weaker ones. In so doing pupils not only profit by the drill work done, but they also profit through habits of service thus rendered.

Step six. Ofttimes the teacher is able to

arrange smaller groups according to the needs of pupils. When such a group or an individual has studied the assignment and is ready for a second test, the monitor or the teacher is notified, and a second test is given. This test may readily be determined by reference to the combined index and table of contents of the booklets. The procedure then continues as described in step four above. The tests are so constructed, planned, and arranged that each skill will be tested one or more times in succeeding tests. Thus the plan avoids the criticism that chance or temporary achievement would invalidate the usefulness and effectiveness of the plan.

#### Conclusions

No claim is made that this modified class and individualized plan of teaching language skills is a panacea for all the ills of language teaching. The authors recognize the criticism that knowledge of a skill does not insure the use of it. To this they agree; but they remind such critics that a pupil is not likely to use a skill rightly and certainly cannot know the standard by which to judge right from wrong usage if he cannot recognize a wrong use of a skill even when inspecting for it. The chief claim for the plan is that it is based upon skills that pupils of respective grades should know, that it wastes no time on the skills known, that it determines systematically and readily where to place the emphasis, that it provides a systematic scheme for helping groups and individuals to overcome their difficulties, that it offers encouragement to those having difficulty by showing them their progress, and that it provides not only a record for the work of each individual for the semester, but also a convenient reference for the teacher of the pupil the succeeding semester.

# Testing to Discover Prevalent Speech Errors

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**T**HIS investigation was made with three English Classes composed of one hundred pupils, boys slightly in the majority, during the first half of the eighth year of study. Each class, though not homogeneously grouped, represented a fairly typical mixture of ability.

These observations make no pretense to originality. The data have been collected solely for the purpose of making possible more efficient correction of prevalent errors, believing that defects common to three heterogeneous groups may be expected to indicate where special emphasis should be placed in another year's study.

In the early part of the school year, all the pupils were urged to make a self-directed study of the speech errors which they heard at home, in the school, or elsewhere. In this way, they were encouraged to listen critically to others' speech, and keep records of errors in a notebook which they kept for the purpose. Many pupils were most ambitious listeners, especially in their own homes, but many others depended solely upon the oral English period for their discoveries. The highest number of mistakes listed by any one pupil was 42 in four weeks' time.

The following specific list of errors included those of greatest frequency which were listed by the pupils themselves.

don't — doesn't  
well — good  
says — said  
was — were  
eat — ate — eaten  
must of — must have  
let — leave  
may — can

more — most  
isn't — ain't  
see — seen  
John — John he  
come — came  
this — this here  
lie — lay  
no — any  
teach — learn  
did — done  
awful — very  
have got — have

It became evident when the pupils' error lists were inventoried that the mistakes which they observed were those upon which they had been working since the early grades. Most so called "sixth and seventh grade errors" were not included in their observations, although these same mistakes were apparent in both their oral and written work in the eighth grade. It would appear, then, that we cannot underestimate the value of continued and purposeful drill, not only upon the defects evident in present speech work, but also upon the study lists outlined for preceding years.

After careful consultation with various sources of "error lists," among which the New York State Syllabus figured chiefly, a test list of fifty sentences was compiled. These fifty sentences were made to include the following:

1. Most common faults noted by teachers and pupils in daily speech of the classes under observation.
2. Most prevalent errors listed by the pupils themselves in their individual study.
3. Correct use lists for special study in primary and intermediate grades.
4. New uses outlined by Syllabus and as

yet not having received special emphasis in eighth grade.

The following condensed list represents the results of the fifty sentence test given in multiple choice form to the three eighth grade classes:

ERRORS	FAILURE TO CORRECT	
	Boys	Girls
don't — doesn't	1	1
well — good	8	9
who — whom	12	4
from — than	23	22
says — said	1	0
fewer — less	23	9
farther — further	13	9
between — among	2	1
unless — without	3	0
was — were	26	14
his — their	36	25
I — me (attribute comp.)	14	7
she — her	5	11
was — were	13	5
this — these	39	27
front of — back of	24	17
almost — most	8	0
eat — ate — eaten	3	0
must of — must have	9	4
have to — haf to	4	0
in — into	9	7
like — as	5	0
let — leave	8	4
beside — alongside	10	3
may — can	4	2
bring — take	10	7
so — as	34	30
my — me	12	17
some — somewhat	2	0
more — most	8	3
isn't — ain't	1	0
saw — seen	5	1
John — John he	1	0
come — came	4	1
no — any	4	0
of — have	6	2
began — begun	30	10
this — this here	3	1
I — me (subject)	2	3
its — it's	13	15

them — those	1	2
off of — off	2	2
awful — very	2	0
teach — learn	2	0
have got — have	1	0
did — done	6	2
lie — lay	6	3
set — sat	12	6
swam — swum	32	30
drank — drunk	18	19

From the above table, we may make the following deductions, possibly of interest to the teacher or student of English:

1. Results from testing for the fifty sets of errors showed that in forty-one cases boys made more mistakes than girls; in seven cases only, girls' total errors exceeded boys'; in two cases only, were the number of errors even for both boys and girls.

2. Boys were in no case found without error, while girls in thirteen cases were 100 per cent or approximately 25 per cent more accurate than boys in speech error correction.

Since the eighth grade is expected to cover a review of all previous speech work, it became evident that further value in this study might lie in the preparation of three tables representing the comparative difficulty of the fifty errors.

Group 1. Errors of supposedly least difficulty for eighth grade pupils. In this list, the frequency was less than ten for each error. It will be noted that Group 1 eliminates 50 per cent of the study list.

ERROR	FAILURE TO CORRECT
don't — doesn't	1
says — said	3
between — among	3
unless — without	8
almost — most	3
eat — ate — eaten	3
have to — haf to	4
like — as	5
may — can	6
some — somewhat	2
isn't — ain't	1



saw — seen	6
John — John he	1
come — came	5
no — any	4
of — have	8
this — this here	4
I — me (subject)	5
them — those	3
off of — off	4
awful — very	2
teach — learn	2
have got — have	1
did — done	8
lie — lay	9

Group 2. Errors of supposedly middle class difficulty. In this group were included errors having a frequency of more than ten, but less than twenty. This list represented twenty-two per cent of the entire list.

ERROR	FAILURE TO CORRECT
well — good	17
who — whom	16
she — her	16
was — were	18
must of — must have	13
in — into	16
let — leave	12
beside — alongside	13
bring — take	17
more — most	11
set — sat	18

Group 3. Errors of supposedly greatest difficulty. This group included those errors where the frequency was twenty or more for each. This list represented 28 per cent of the total list.

ERROR	FAILURE TO CORRECT
from — than	45
fewer — less	32
farther — further	22
was — were	40
his — their	61
this — these	66
front of — back of	41
so — as	64
my — me	29
began — begun	40
its — it's	28
swam — swum	62
drank — drunk	37
I — me (attribute comp.)	21

If these tables are to be considered as an aid in the study of eighth grade speech errors, it may be helpful to know that most of our real difficulties fall in a comparatively small class. It will perhaps prove an advantage in further study to work intensively on a few outstanding errors rather than to attempt to study many. Changing study plans to fit the needs of each group, and retesting to discover errors that are still prevalent, should indicate proper procedure for further study.

## CHILDREN AND POETRY

(Continued from page 60)

to the one designed for younger folk. Nathalia Crane's spontaneous and delightful poems in *THE JANITOR'S BOY* will be especially enjoyed by girls in their early 'teens. They are full of humor, a zest for life, keen observation and a sense of beauty. Their sophistication makes them more suitable for the city child. The little ten cent volume of poems, unfortunately titled, *ONE HUNDRED BEST POEMS FOR BOYS AND GIRLS*, must not be forgotten. The poems,

on the whole, are well selected, are by modern writers, and are presented without comment. There is both an author list and title index and the format is quite attractive. Among the older collections, Lucas' *A BOOK OF VERSES FOR CHILDREN*, *GOLDEN NUMBERS*, and Ingpen's *ONE THOUSAND POEMS FOR CHILDREN* are all well liked. Stevenson's *THE HOME BOOK OF VERSE* is one of the most satisfactory collections for the home library.

(To be concluded)

# Editorial

## SECONDARY—SCHOOL MINDED

THE lack of consciousness of high-school and college instructors of elementary school problems and interests is responsible for much of the backwardness in English teaching today. This is more particularly true since so many leaders in educational organizations, who have the time and energy to put into professional work, are from this group. And this matters a great deal, because so many of them are secondary—school minded and college minded in all that they do, with little thought, feeling, or imagination for the teaching of children in the elementary schools.

Too often the impression is given that these specialists in higher education are meeting requirements of constructive work in the elementary school. They write chapters in books, they compile bibliographies purporting to cover elementary English adequately. Yet what is the true situation? One bibliography claiming all-inclusiveness, listing more than 3,000 titles, discloses, after hours of painful scrutiny, some ten or a dozen references to elementary English. A recent brochure, for which the author claims representative treatment of all phases of English, elementary school through the university, for a period of twenty years, shows a similar neglect. Upon what sources are based the claims to adequate representation of elementary school studies in English for those two decades? Investigation discloses a dozen and a half titles, possibly a few more. And the individual authorities consulted narrow even further to some half dozen. Now the point is not so much that so few authorities are drawn upon, or so few titles reported in this study, but that the author should claim so much in the name of elementary school English, when what he gives the subject is only a whitewash.

There is unfairness in all of this because no department in all educational life today is so full of active interest and energy as

elementary school English teaching. There is no objection at all to all the excellent books on high school English that can be written; they are needed. The better they are, the more good to all concerned. But why tie elementary English to the kite tail? What is objectionable is the assumption of more in the name of elementary school English than the actual offerings seem to justify.

On similar grounds, there have been complaints against leadership within the National Council of Teachers of English during the past few years. Half-hearted leadership in some instances has been more of an embarrassment than an aid to progress. This has been sufficiently serious to make it incumbent upon all grade school teachers to guard against its negative effects. Quite well-intentioned persons are frequently the offenders. For example, on an important occasion not long ago, a past president of the National Council of Teachers of English declared that he had no enthusiasm for spending thought and money upon the production of recreational reading lists. And his attitude was more than a passing incident. Yet teachers of elementary school English say they need a recreational reading list prepared under competent committee organization. For more than two years, they have been waiting for a list announced by the National Council of Teachers of English. Two years is not long to wait for a satisfactory reading list, some one may reply. That is well enough, but the truth of the matter is that direct inquiry brings no assurance that the list will be published at any date soon. And why? Those working directly in the field of elementary school English would answer "Because the leadership in the organization has been essentially secondary school minded, and not sufficiently responsive to the needs of teachers of grade school English."

## Reviews and Abstracts

IN THE DAYS OF YOUNG WASHINGTON. By Nancy Byrd Turner. Houghton Mifflin Company. 1931. Illustrated. \$2.00

Why we unconsciously looked for something comparable to Sandburg's magnificent picture of the early years of Lincoln in this piece of Washington bi-centennial fiction, is inexplicable, for it is not within the powers of anyone living to relive the pre-Revolutionary period as completely as Sandburg relived the pre-Civil War period, culling as he did the finest of the memories of those who had known his hero personally.

IN THE DAYS OF YOUNG WASHINGTON is an interesting story of three children who adventured in the neighborhood in which George Washington was raised, and who enjoyed the particular excitement of capturing George's runaway horse and returning it to his mother's fields. Miss Turner's picture of Mary Ball Washington is a beautiful and enduring portrait of a woman who loved growing things and who found deep contentment in simplicity and kindness. In the several appearances George Washington makes in the story one recognizes in him his mother's friendliness mingled with the absolute fearlessness and self-assurance that were later to make him a capable leader of men. The eighteenth century country life which forms the background for the activities of the two little Archers from Williamsburg and their fast friend Tabitha Tibbetts is convincingly realistic. Thirteen year old Washington is seen but seldom in the course of the book but upon those few occasions comes to life speedily under Miss Turner's deft touch.

Mary Griffin Newton  
Formerly Staff Reviewer for  
The Detroit Free Press

ZEKE. By Mary White Ovington. Illustrated. Harcourt, Brace and Company. 1931. \$2.00

Adjustment to life "away at school" is difficult for the white girl or boy. For Zeke, the fifteen year old colored boy who is the central figure in Miss Ovington's new book, it was doubly hard. And the hardest thing of all, thought Zeke, newly established in "Tolliver," was the stairs. He had always slept near the earth before, and lived near it at home. The doctor had been pretty bad too, treated him uncereemoniously, even taken a drop of blood from his finger. And the other boys all seemed so much wiser, so much older and so much more able to manage.

The amazement and discouragement of the boy who had known only a long shabby line of negro huts, a tiny school, a vegetable garden and cotton patch at home, and his slow awakening to the larger aspects of education, to the achievements and aspirations of the finer of his race, are capably presented in ZEKE. Miss Ovington shows an exquisite understanding of the colored child, plus rare ability to catch in print his glad, melancholy, music loving nature. In Zeke, Junior, Pidge, Natu, Vesta and the mayor's daughter, she gives a variety of realistic school portraits. At present Miss Ovington is chairman of the Board of Directors for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Her service to the negro in America is of long standing, and while ZEKE is most certainly able propaganda for the success of her cause, it stands on stable feet as a piece of excellent juvenile fiction. Tolliver Institute which she uses as a setting is without doubt Tuskegee, founded by Booker T. Washington and famous as an industrial training school.

Mary Griffin Newton

THE QUEEN OF THE PIRATE ISLE. By Bret Harte. Illustrated by Kate Greenaway. Houghton Mifflin Co. 1931. \$1.50

The characters and plot of this old story are as absorbing to children today as they were the day they were fashioned, but it will be a rare modern child who can enjoy Bret Harte's involved manner of narration. The very young modern reader has for example, far too simplified tastes to enjoy such sentences as the following:

"Polly, with one of the swift transitions of childhood, immediately began to extemporise a house for the party at the mouth of the tunnel and with parental foresight gathered the fragments of the squibs to build a fire for supper."

That Kate Greenaway should have illustrated a book of pirate adventure, even one written by Bret Harte, is in itself an inconsistency. As usual, the famous English artist's drawings are delicate and appealing, but their gentle mood is far removed from that which the author would inspire. So competent in picturing golden-haired youngsters, pink roses and English Garden scenes, Kate Greenaway was the last person on earth to interpret the rough and ready children of the western world. Taken in its entirety THE QUEEN OF THE PIRATE ISLE is disappointing from a modern viewpoint.

Mary Griffin Newton



# Shop Talk

## THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

The next annual meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English will be held in Memphis, Tennessee, November 24-26th. This will be the first time the Council has met in the far South since the meeting in Chattanooga in 1922. Please make provision in your 1932 budget for the trip to Memphis.

There will be an exhibit of students' work at the Memphis meeting, following the custom of former years. The theme selected was suggested by the following quotation from an address delivered by Dr. Raymond B. Fosdick at Princeton University:

Civilization is the process of moving from one set of loyalties to another. As we grow, the loyalties become larger and wider. If we are going to live in the twentieth century, we cannot keep our feet in the eighteenth.

The theme of the exhibit may be phrased: Internationalism Based upon World Acquaintance and Understanding. Composition and reading activities that suggest the right attitudes towards social groups, that promote understanding, that encourage a sane and sympathetic feeling toward all sections of the United States and towards foreign countries, will identify the study of English with the world issues that confront us, and give it an added significance.

The theme permits many variations adapted to pupils of different abilities. It encourages studies of various sections of the United States and of foreign countries; it arouses interest in the study of world literature; it invites correspondence with pupils in foreign countries. It suggests topics for discussion and debate for those interested in international questions. It lends itself easily to correlation with the social sciences and the arts. It implies a delightful body of reading about foreign countries, adapted to the younger as well as to the older pupils.

The exhibit may consist of pupils' anthologies, travel books, guide books, compositions, lists of classified titles, annotated briefly, accounts of club and

assembly programs, digests of world news—in fact, whatever stresses the right international viewpoint and emphasizes the fact that the world does interlock. Lists of appropriate topics for compositions will be helpful to all teachers. Attitudes and action patterns of the right kind are the objectives in view.

Because of acute economic conditions facing everybody and every organization, we must make special effort not to let any of the Council's activities fall below the record of former years. Let us try to reach a new level of achievement. Each member can serve the Council in this critical year by giving publicity to the Council and its enterprises. We need new members; we should advertise our publications; we should cooperate with the Curriculum Commission; we should push the work of all the committees. The National Council has the opportunity this year of serving not only the needs of teachers of English but the whole cause of education, by upholding high professional standards and forcing the public to realize that the educational opportunities for American youth must be extended rather than curtailed.

*Stella S. Center*

*President, The National Council  
of Teachers of English*

## PRIZES FOR BOOK REVIEWS

The Oxford University Press announces a series of prizes for book reviews written by boys and girls. There will be two groups of prizes, one group for boys and girls from six to ten years and one for boys and girls from eleven to sixteen years. The prizes in each group are first prize, \$15.00, second prize, \$10.00, and third prize, \$5.00. Also there will be ten honorable mentions with book awards.

The final judges will be May Lamberton Becker, Editor of *St. Nicholas* and Helen Ferris, Editor of the *Junior Literary Guild*.

The rules and all information may be secured by addressing the Oxford University Press, Books for Boys and Girls, 114 Fifth Avenue, New York.

(Continued from page 56)

organization of all lessons into units, so that the effects of practice may be cumulative. If the expressional units be in the content subjects, language usage will be incidentally practiced in situations approaching those of real life. Then drills in such elements of usage as are found weak will—as has been said—have to be given in separate periods, the psychological demand for distributed practice being considered. Of course, language usage may be handled in units of its own. At any rate, the progressive teacher is abandoning the practice of teaching language phases in haphazard order, in favor of the plan of a systematically arranged program of training and practice.

The last improvement in procedures in training for language usage to be discussed is highly important. The situations that call for expression should be highly lifelike, or, in other words, should utilize the *functional centers* of expression as determined by Roy Ivan Johnson. He investigated the types of oral and written expression demanded in real-

life situations. These he determined to be conversation, informal discussion, formal discussion, reports, special occasion talks, directions, instructions and explanations, storytelling, personal memoranda, and letters. The pupils should be given opportunity in school to express themselves along the lines of these various functional centers. Thus we can more surely expect a "carry-over" of language instruction into all expressional situations.

This paper very incompletely presents techniques for improving procedures in training pupils for adequate language usage. If any teacher keeps in mind the principles of a *definitely determined location* of difficulties, *individualized instruction*, *all-day-long teaching of usage in all expressional situations*, and the *lifelikeness* of such situations, she can evolve techniques for herself. Language usage can be as efficiently taught as any other type of lesson provided the teacher understands what she is about and diligently applies herself.

### APPLIED GRAMMAR AND "EDITING"

(Continued from page 67)

How can the first clause be made to sound better? the second?

So revised the sentence would read:

A few weeks found Jane's father a rich man living in a Park Avenue apartment, but he still held his nightwatchman's job.

2. If you preferred editing the pupil's revision of the sentence instead of the original, these questions might have been asked:

What was the second clause in the original sentence?

Which is the more important idea: *he lived in a Park Avenue apartment* or *he still held his nightwatchman's job*? Then, which had better be stated as a clause? What should be the subject of this last clause?

Are the ideas offered by these clauses supporting or contrasting? What conjunction is needed? What punctuation mark?

Is the sentence clearer with *father* as the subject of the first clause? Could the writer still begin the sentence with *In a few weeks* if he wished?

Is the *and* before the participial phrase in the first clause necessary?

So revised the sentence would read:

In a few weeks Jane's father was a rich man living in a Park Avenue apartment, but he still held his nightwatchman's job.

While the child is writing, grammar must take its place in the fringe of consciousness along with spelling and penmanship. But in revising written discourse grammatical relationships can and should be brought out into the open. Such procedure not only strengthens the child's feeling for form; it also gives meaning to his study of grammar. For a habit is best learned in a situation similar to the one in which it will be used.

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